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ABSTRACT

Current reading theory suggests that oral language skills and reading skills interact with and implement each other. Three guidelines are helpful in shaping the development of proficient readers. (1) From kindergarten on, each year should be spent moving from oral language to print. Furthermore, the move within oral language should be from dialogue to monologue to narrative to exposition in emphasis. (2) Movement through the grades should incorporate an increasing number of activities cast in a rhetorical settings (the reader should move from a relatively rich fictive mode--short stories and drama--to assertions, paragraphs, and passages in which the reader must focus on syntactic and semantic detail). Development of comprehension skills in arhetorical settings should begin with metalinguistic games (playing with language) in the earliest years of school. (3) As the student moves through the grades, there should be an effort to coordinate joint involvement in utterance and text activities. This coordination allows comprehension skills learned in one mode of discourse to be applied in another mode of discourse. (TJ)

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AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THE READING PROGRAM

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LANGUAGE GAMES---
AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THE READING PROGRAM

Several years ago a German language philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, elaborated the concept of "language games." In his work (most prominent of which in translation has been The Blue and Brown Books), he suggests that human beings reach their highest linguistic sophistication in both the explicit and implicit uses of language for shaping contexts and messages as much as for communicating a specified set of information as denotatively defined in the lexical items of the utterance. The propositional and non-propositional uses of language in everyday functioning for human beings extends far beyond mere communication of information as specified in the stream of oral discourse. The contemporary language philosopher, John Searle, refers to such functions as categories of "speech acts." (Searle, 1969) This language use, in its grosser forms at least, appears very early in the development of the child as Lois Bloom points out in her research in developmental psycholinguistics. She cites, for instance, the multiple uses of utterances such as, "Mommy sock" by her own child. In some instances this utterance was used to assert propositions about actions of the mother. She was picking up the sock or placing it in a drawer, etc. In other cases, the assertion had to do with the child's description of her own acts

or behavior. "I'm putting the sock on" or the like. The act of the asserting then defines the meaning of the utterance as much as, if not more than, does the semantics of the vocabulary within. To put it another way, at least in oral modes of discourse, language-as-meaning-bearer or invoker is not structurally autonomous. Meaning is shaped not only by the semantics of individual words and how those words are put together, but also by the intent of the speaker and the speech act which conveys that intent in a given context. As D. Olson observes, "the meaning of the utterance comes from shared intentions based upon prior knowledge, the context of the utterance, and habitual patterns of interaction." (Olson, p. 261)

Now as one moves from oral discourse or utterance to print or text, there is a dramatic reduction in context-dependency for meaning. Of course, the traditional linguistic context cues used in the reading act coupled with the reader's experiences provide assistance. "The notes were sour because the seams were split" for instance makes sense only if the reader both has had experience with bagpipes, and linguistic cues in the passage key his mental energies to musical concerns. However, the writer overall is denied the range of paralinguistic tools --- gesture, facial expression and the like -- many of the suprasegmental features of oral language -- pitch, stress, etc., and the uniqueness of each oral communication situation to capitalize upon to get his message across. Only the relatively cold and psychologically distant abstractions which are the symbols of language are available. Assumptions about the message receiver which were possible in the oral language setting no longer hold. Only the broadest assumptions about audience can be made and even in the most informal print situations, precise language use is called for. Consider, for instance, the relatively high degree of ellipsis in oral language compared to print. Perhaps even a majority of our utterances would qualify as written sentence fragments,

"What are you eating?"

"Apple"

"Oh"..."How is it"

"Ok, I guess"

"Sour?"

"A little"

Further, analysis of discourse patterns reveals a far looser approach to thought organization, movement from premises to conclusion, etc. In print, however, such options are simply not available to the writer, at least if the writer assumes a genuine desire to communicate.

This reduction of context-dependency-for-meaning in the move from utterance to text represents a move in psychological distance from meaning which is immediate and direct to that which is removed and tangential; from nonmediated to mediated --- and mediated at that by a complex symbol system cast into the secondary form of print. In short, the move is in the direction of increased language abstraction and thus increased complexity.

This approach to meaning, of course, expands the perception of comprehension in the reading act to include far more than text per se. Meaning dwells not in the specific words or sentences but in the uses to which they are put. It argues rather strongly for a comprehensive view of language meaning in the prospective reader; a view which includes a major scope of language use functions, their potential in varied settings, along with the constraints which impose as well.

We should recognize, too, that the move in context-dependency-for-meaning from utterance to text corresponds in many respects to the developmental growth of the child through the years of elementary school. Piaget noted several years ago the egocentric nature of the pre-operational child (up to about 7 years of age). Context-dependency not only requires an

immediacy but as well a personal perception of self in every experience for this child --- often the kindergartener and first grader in our beginning reading program. The thinking and the language of the pre-operational child is "transductive" in nature, neither deductive nor inductive; but, instead, a simple matter of drawing direct causal links by physical, geographical or whimsical association --- a sort of argumentum post hoc, ergo propter hoc gone wild. All things can be connected in virtually any way. Often this attribute surfaces in animistic terms -- the sun and moon accompany us on walks, everything has been made for people, clouds start moving by themselves, the boat goes on the lake because it wants to. (Piaget, 1928, pp. 180-186) In fact, many of the attributes of sentence structure which children "violate" in their early years, such as the adult grammar rule that animate verbs require animate nouns, are in terms of the child's cognitive world, reasonable uses of language.

The research suggests that the move away from this context-dependency is a gradual development which can be solidly achieved only well into the school years. (Clark, 1973; Donaldson & Lloyd, 1974) Cox (1976) suggests that many early reading difficulties in 6 and 7 year olds can be developmentally related, i.e., many learners are not at the operational reasoning stage.* And it is largely the ability to remove self from an immediate context and find meaning in the linguistics and operations of a given task which marks the operational child.

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*This would correspond with similar work by the author where informal comparisons of selected 4th grade learner performances on reading comprehension tests where scores on specific inferential comprehension objectives were low, with performance on nonprint cognitive ability tasks designed to identify concrete operational reasoners (Piagetian measures on Some-All Classification, Class Inclusion, and Seriation) pointed out similar results. None of the poor readers sampled were into concrete operations as measured by the tasks.

It too should be noted here that measures designed to reveal abilities of the reader to relate inference to meaning through reading comprehension in arhetorical settings, i.e., those contrived to demand only attention to given sets of assertions with limited linguistic or other contextual aids, show interesting results across ages. Piaget notes,

> Another and very different case of syncretism which we discovered is equally suggestive from the point of view of the analytical weakness shown by the child whenever there is any question of connecting propositions or even of understanding words independently of the schemas in which they are enveloped. The child is given a certain number of easy proverbs and a certain number of corresponding sentences jumbled together, but each meaning the same thing as one of the given proverbs. He is then asked to find the connection. Now up till the age of 11-12 the child chooses the corresponding sentence more or less at random, or at any rate by means of accidental and purely superficial analogies. (Piaget, 1928, pp. 231-232)

Paraphrasis in arhetorical contexts is difficult. Even 4th graders tend not to sense the possibility of syntactically unlike reciprocals. Although formal stage reasoners will not always accept the reciprocity of specific assertions, they seem to at least allow that such operations are permissible. (Klein, 1973; Piaget, 1928)

To some extent then the context-dependency of meaning resides also in all print. Arhetorical print is to text as rhetorical print is to utterance. Other things being equal, arhetorical passages in text are more difficult to comprehend than are rhetorical passages.

We should note as well that the body of research which points to the range of syntactic and semantic facilities in better readers is impressive. (Loban, 1976; Isakson & Miller, 1976; Cunningham, 1976; Perfetti & Goldman, 1976; Muehl & DiNello, 1976, et al) It perhaps comes as little surprise that this should be the case. It has long been suggested, for instance, that overall language ability correlated highly with reading achievement. However, considered in a developmental perspective, the results of this research appear even more significant.

We should note that the psychological distance which exists between utterance and text and that which exists between beginning reader and the more advanced reader in the upper elementary grades are similar in character of abstraction but not in the pragmatics of pedagogical decision-making. Given that meaning is context-dependent and that context in its more conspicuous senses diminishes dramatically as one moves from utterance to text, then the most extreme interpretation would be to move from oral discourse to written symbols across grades; focus upon the utilization of oral language in varying contexts and for varying purposes in the primary grades, then upon the printed symbol in later grades with meaning comprehension developed in an evolutionary sense, moving in a finely tuned program from oral discourse contexts to and through text in a variety of print discourse modes. However, that is not likely the way most of us learn to read nor for that matter the way we come to grips with meaning in either of the two language expression modes, oral or written. It is the constant interaction of the two modes mediated by mental processes which enables us to elaborate a schema of comprehension which is continually being refined and being brought to bear on new contexts and new circumstances of language use.

Our primary pedagogical concern then should be with determining the types of language use facilities and contexts which will produce the most capable readers as well as those most proficient in oral discourse.

Given the assumptions elaborated in the preceding, the following may be viewed as principles, or at least guidelines for shaping the development of quality readers.

1) Generally speaking, the move across grades from kindergarten on up as well as within individual grades from beginning of the school year till the end, should be from oral language to AND through print. The context-dependency of meaning suggests that a solid oral language

base is of fundamental importance for any kind of reading program. Further, the move within oral language use itself should be from dialogue to monologue to narrative to exposition in emphasis. We are defining dialogue here in a broad way to include both natural dialogue (conversation) and oral monologue, the latter being more suggestive of text than is natural dialogue utterance. Johnson (1977) points out the need to re-examine some of our early language experience approaches to beginning reading instruction and our assumption that natural dialogue in utterance is a useful data source for text. Johnson rightfully points to monologue utterance as more closely related to text in form.

However, to assume that monologue thus serves as a more legitimate source base for the text, might overlook the contextual richness of dialogue and thus its likely comprehensible nature. Certainly, however, both are useful and a relatively early move from conversation or oral dialogue to oral monologue is an important consideration. Overall, it appears reasonable to assume that fictive modes of oral discourse are contextually richer than are those in exposition. They are basically attempts to duplicate reality in a more direct fashion. The same holds true within text as well. In the case of text, however, the teacher has fewer selectional options since most authors of basal readers have built in the fictive mode so strongly. In designing the oral language component, however, considerable more effort is required to assure that the child eventually comes to see meaning in language use where the circumstances and content of the use are not contextually rich; where the speaker and listener must attend to the specific linguistic cues in much the same way that the reader must attend to print cues.

Once again, the matter is easier to deal with in kindergarten and 1st grade where the child is so egocentrically involved in all language that he/she produces or consumes. Puppet play and similar activities are by definition in the fictive mode and oral transcriptions of reality in ways that other oral activities such as show and tell are not. At the risk of oversimplifying, puppet play precedes show and tell, creative interpretation precedes panel or small group discussion. Ritualized jokes and riddles precede puns or metaphoric allusions.

In the upper grades, refinements should even appear within a given mode of discourse. Description should precede explanation. Explanation should precede argumentation. Again, the defining criterion is contextual richness. The richer the context, the more abundant the meaning cues in the discourse; the more abundant the meaning cues, the higher the degree of comprehension regardless of learner abilities. In argumentative exposition, for instance, utterance as well as text, there is a virtual absence of nonlinguistic contextual assistance other than the setting. In at least one sense, mastery of this form of exposition is the most important facility to be developed for comprehension of language. It demands more of the listener/reader while providing far less in the way of nonlinguistic cues. Thus, in the hierarchial sense. it may be perceived as being at the highest taxonomic level, including other comprehension levels.

2) Movement through the grades should systematically incorporate an increasing number of activities cast in arhetorical settings. That is, within reading materials the prospective reader should move from a relatively contextually rich fictive mode -- short stories,

including dialogue, pictures, etc., narratively based poetry, drama with ample dialogue, etc. -- to assertions, paragraphs, passages devoid of context where the learner must focus in a tight analytic fashion on the syntactic and semantic detail, explore the logical impact of moving syntactic constructs such as conditional or disjunctive clauses within sentences, and the rhetorical impact of relocating semantic cues such as 'only' or 'maybe' or 'since'. Textual detail is obviously available in all text modes.

We must remember, however, that the cognitive facility and linguistic repertoire of the learner isn't equivalent at all stages of development.

Preparation for the utilization of comprehension skills in arhetorical settings should begin in metalinguistic games in the earliest years of school. Metalinguistic sensitivity -- the ability and desire to use language to describe, explain, or play with our language -- is an important precursor to the more advanced application of such facilities in exploring rhetorical nuance in literature or in applying a critical eye to argumentative discourse in text. That is, higher level comprehension in rhetorical contexts must ultimately depend upon those analytical skills which are at least partly developed in arhetorical contexts such as in metalinguistic play or exploration.

Metalinguistic activities in their grossest form do appear as intentional language play. Courtney Cazden for instance provides an account of metalinguistic play by a second grader in an inner city reading class. Youngsters were reading silently in small groups, when a child raised his hand and motioned her over. "What is this word?" he queried, pointing to w-h-a-t in his book. "What,"

responded Cazden. "This word?" he questioned once more with a twinkle in his eye. This ability in the young second grader, however, must be considered in the light of research in metalinguistic awareness of young school children generally which suggests that there is surprisingly little formal metalanguage knowledge. Holden and MacGinitie (1972) report confusion in the responses of kindergarteners and first graders to tasks designed to elicit their awareness of the linguistic terms assumed implicit in the teaching of reading -- 'letter', 'word', and 'sentence'. John Downing concludes,

> There are indications from a wide range of investigations that beginners are confused about technical linguistic concepts used in reading instruction. Also there is indirect evidence that this confusion is an important factor in success or failure in learning to read. (Downing, p. 15)

We are arguing here, as Mattingly and Kavanagh do (Language by Ear and by Eye, 1972) that,

> Reading is seen not as a parallel activity in the visual mode to speech perception in the auditory mode; there are differences between the two activities that cannot be explained in terms of the difference of modality. They can be explained only if we regard reading as a deliberately acquired, language-based skill, dependent upon the speaker-hearer's awareness of certain aspects of primary linguistic activity. By virtue of this linguistic awareness, written text initiates the synthetic linguistic process common to both reading and speech, enabling the reader to get the writer's message and so to recognize what has been written.

Informal metalinguistic activities would appear to hold promise for enhancing the ability to function more explicitly with the formal metalanguage which so specifically dominates much of the instruction in reading in our schools, and probably necessarily so. Further, however, such metalinguistic play would appear to assist

the prospective reader in coming to grips with that "synthetic linguistic process" which Mattingly asserts is essential to deriving meaning in text.

Reading comprehension is rooted in a total language base with oral language predominant. Though the younger school age child is more immediately tied to contextually rich oral discourse, metalinguistic play can be a first important step toward the development of arhetorical analytic skills where the learner turns the language on itself, in some cases manipulating that language simply to discover what happens in the process. A close textual analysis of individual assertions, say at a 12th grade level, then is in some senses similar to simple metalinguistic play by a 1st grader. Hopefully, in between there is a range of activities -- jokes, puns, riddles, puzzles, games, symbolic play -- which moves our learner from informal to formal metalinguistic activities.* For in this direction there seems the promise of necessary analytic skills central to more elegant levels of reading comprehension.

3) As one moves through the grades there should be increasing effort to coordinate and facilitate joint involvement in utterance and text activities where the two expressive modes have been intentionally matched -- to whatever degree possible -- for contextual richness. The use of oral discourse then corresponds in general character and function to that being explored in text. For instance, matches on dialogue, monologue, narration and exposition should be explored and utilized in a coordinated fashion -- dramatic expression

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*One may note under such a premise a renewed role for "grammar study as metalinguistics" rather than as direct assist to speaking, reading, or writing where the research outside of transformational sentence combining has not been promising.

and performance keyed to dramatic text; problem-solving oriented assignments in small group discussion activities correlated with reading assignments in argumentative and/or persuasive exposition in text, etc.

The assumption is, of course, that such correlated activities are not contrived in an artificial sense and that other utterance-oriented and text-centered activities do take place and do so jointly. We are concerned only that learners be placed in a context which encourages the application of comprehension skills implicit in one discourse mode to another which may benefit most directly from those skills.

And this same qualification applies to all of the various suggestions cast within the several principles or guidelines discussed here. The primary value of research and theory is to suggest parameters around which decisions for instruction and materials selection might be based. The parameters suggested here are intentionally broad in nature. They are not intended to be restrictive so much as directional. They are intended to be neither prescriptive in their order of application nor delimiting in their utilization. But rather their value it would seem would be in providing a basic directional sense for the reading/language arts program and the beginning of a rationale teachers can articulate, a much needed skill in this age of education when our ability to say what it is we are about and why is perhaps more important than at any other time in recent history.

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